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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8536
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4478
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000001

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#) [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KFLO](#) [MARR](#)
PINR
SUBJECT: MGPK02: SITREP 7: CALM RETURNS; CONFUSION OVER
ELECTION DATE, INVESTIGATION CONTINUES

REF: ISLAMABAD 5392

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Calm returned across Pakistan on New Year's Day. The Election Commission met and decided to consult with the political parties January 2 before making a final decision to postpone the elections. Various political parties have differing view on whether to delay. Bhutto widower Zardari told Ambassador he was opposed to a delay. The GOP also seems to be in a state of protracted confusion about the date of elections and the status of the investigation of Benazir Bhutto's assassination. Ambassador has counseled the government on the need to speak with one voice. All Embassy and consulate operations are normal. End Summary.

Elections Date

12. (C) The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) met to review the various reports filed from ECP offices in the provinces with respect to their ability to conduct elections on January 8. The ECP decided to consult first with the political parties on January 2, after which the ECP will make a final decision on a date for elections. Ambassador called the Election Commissioner to express our view that the ECP decide on a firm date as soon as possible; the Commissioner argued for a date in mid-February.

13. (C) The political parties themselves are gaming out their advantages if a delay occurs. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-chairman Asif Zardari adamantly told Ambassador January 1 that the PPP wants elections on time. We are not sure what is happening within the PPP, but Zardari has already told us that the PPP's candidate for PM, Amin Faheem, "does not represent me." The PPP will hold a Central Executive Committee meeting in Larkana January 2 on the subject of an election date. The Pakistan Muslim League-N (N) of Nawaz Sharif supports on time elections, but will follow the lead of the PPP and, privately, told us they could accept a delay through the 40 day mourning period for Bhutto. The Pakistan Muslim League (PML) which initially had supported a delay now says it is prepared to go forward with elections on time. NSA Tariq Aziz told Ambassador January 1 that the GOP was leaning towards January 29 as the date for elections; later in the day, he said February 11 was a likely date.

¶4. (C) IFES, which is embedded in the ECP as a consultant, does not believe the ECP can hold elections on time for logistical reasons stemming from the post-assassination violence, especially in Sindh province. IFES predicts the ECP will be forced to delay for 2-3 weeks.

Investigation

¶5. (SBU) The Sunday press is full of conflicting stories about the investigation into Benazir Bhutto's assassination. At a press conference December 31, the Caretaker Interior Minister "apologized" for the "blunder" made by MOI Brigadier Cheema when he said that Bhutto had died because her head hit the lever of her bullet-proof land cruiser.

¶6. (C) Tariq Aziz told Ambassador that ISI Director Nadeem Taj would be briefing Zardari January 2 on the status of the investigation. There is still no official GOP announcement that it will accept an independent investigation. Caretaker PM Soomro has left open the possibility of accepting assistance, and the MFA is quoted as saying the GOP would "not shy away from receiving assistance, if needed." The UK High Commission advised post that Scotland Yard has already begun preliminary work in London but has not yet been asked officially to assist. The media report that the PPP has formed a committee to draft a resolution to be sent to the UN demanding that an expert commission be established to investigate Bhutto's assassination. Taking full advantage of all the international speculation and publicity surrounding Bhutto's death, the Tehreek-i-Taliban (of Baitullah Mehsud) incredulously told BBC that it, too, was demanding an independent investigation.

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¶7. (U) Meanwhile, a four member police team began the formal on-site investigation. The Punjab Provincial government announced it is offering a reward of five million rupees (approximately \$833,000) reward for anyone with information about Bhutto's assassination.

Protests

¶8. (U) Although mourners continue to throng the site of Bhutto's mausoleum, post-assassination violence has faded across the country.

¶9. (U) Eleven people were killed in Parachinar, the site of ten days of Sunni-Shia sectarian and tribal clashes which have left a reported 300 people dead and another 650 injured.

Coalition Fuel Supplies

¶10. (U) Fuel trucks supplying U.S. forces in Afghanistan have slowly begun moving again as roads have cleared and become more secure. Several trucks crossed the border yesterday, and many more are en route.

PATTERSON